

Eve Steiner:

Cycling for MS Awareness

By *Patty Tobin & Austine Graff*

After approximately 2,250 miles and more than fifty days of cycling, twenty-eight year old Eve Steiner of Salt Lake City, Utah completed her East Coast bike tour designed to raise awareness about multiple sclerosis (MS). The tour took her on a path from Bar Harbor, ME on September 3rd, landing in Philadelphia on September 29th, and concluded in Jacksonville, FL on October 28th. It was a journey filled with hills and valleys, new and friendly faces, and an overarching spirit of determination, motivation and inspiration.



Steiner has relapsing-remitting MS (RRMS), a disease characterized by periods of impaired neurological function (including blurred vision and loss of motor skills) that can ultimately lead to permanent disability. Steiner was diagnosed with MS when she was just sixteen years old. After

experiencing tingling and numbness in her legs, an MRI confirmed her diagnosis. Steiner was in disbelief and feared that her diagnosis would interfere with her daily life at such a young age.

Yet, Steiner was determined to pursue her passion for mountain biking. This wasn't always easy, as her MS affected her balance and made it difficult to ride. When she was introduced to road biking, Steiner realized that her passion for biking did not have to end because of her disease. The long rides and smooth roads gave Steiner a new perspective on MS, and she chose not to let it define her. Steiner began taking Copaxone, an MS drug used to manage the disease, when she was twenty years old and by managing her disease for the past eight years has been able to live a full and active life, pursuing the things she loves to do.

Her love of biking and the therapeutic effects of exercise on her disease encouraged Steiner to embark on a bike tour leading her all around the country. Steiner's East Coast bike tour, from September 3rd-October 28th, was the fourth and final leg of Steiner's self-coined "pedal my way around the U.S" journey. Her cycling accomplishments to date also include her first tour from Seattle to Washington D.C, her second tour from Alaska to Tijuana and more recently, her tour from San Diego, CA to Jacksonville FL. Steiner stopped in Philadelphia September 29th-October 1st to share her story with MS sufferers and non-sufferers alike, get a relaxing massage, and prepare for the rest of her journey.

Steiner states that her "main goal during her bike tours has been to raise awareness for MS and motivate others to do what they love to do." As she biked from Maine to Florida, Steiner stopped in cities along the route to share her personal story with peers in the MS community. Her objective then was, and still is, to help others with the disease understand that a diagnosis of MS does not have to put a damper on achieving personal dreams - even if their dreams do not take them from ocean to ocean like her own.

As a member of Teva Neuroscience's Team Copaxone, a group of individuals with MS who have managed to accomplish extraordinary feats. Steiner found it truly fulfilling when she was able to reassure a woman from Phoenix, who had recently been diagnosed



with MS, that her involvement with biking did not have to end. She recommended a number of adjustments that can be made to a bike in order to accommodate the symptoms of the disease. Recumbent bikes, clip-less pedals, tricycles and tandem bikes can all be used to make biking easier for those suffering with MS.

In order to get in shape for such a long cycling trip, Steiner did hour sessions of cardio five times a

week. She prefers the stair climber to other cardio machines because it works the same muscles that are used when cycling. However, Steiner admits that the true training for the tour was actually the first two weeks of cycling. "There is no specific way to train for cycling fifty to seventy miles a day with fifty pounds of gear," said Steiner adding that she feels healthiest on these rides and embraces the physical challenge.

Heat and fatigue are the two main obstacles that Steiner faced as she trekked across the country. One of Steiner's MS symptoms is thermo sensitivity, or an enhanced sensitivity to heat. In order to combat the heat, she uses a water bottle as opposed to CamelPak, which is worn on the back like a backpack. Steiner also carries ice packs when she cycles and makes frequent stops for ice when she is feeling overheated. Fatigue, another symptom of MS, is something that must also be dealt with when cycling. Steiner makes an effort not to overexert herself when she is feeling fatigue. Massages and lots of sleep help her muscles and mind stay alert. Since Steiner takes a daily injection of an MS drug, Copaxone, to help manage her disease, she needed to continue with her therapy through the duration of her tour, and therefore carried a number of syringes in a cool pack on her bike and mail-dropped her medication in every major city.

During Steiner's East Coast tour she averaged approximately fifty miles a day. Steiner pumped mile after mile, savoring the burn and the sweat with her fiancé and riding partner Rick, whom she met on her last bike tour in 2004. The two, who have been engaged since August, camped and stayed in motels along their route to rest and repair every night.

"A diagnosis of MS is not a death sentence, especially with medication. If you take a proactive approach, eat right, exercise, and take your medication, then the sky is the limit," says Steiner.

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